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## CURFEW FOR CITY CHILDREN.

BY MRS. JOHN D. TOWNSEND.

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FOR more than thirty years the welfare of children in this country has been to me food for anxious thought. The awful precocity of youth and the criminal irresponsibility of parents, both alarmingly more glaring year by year, have so constantly been before me, that, when the query is made, "Why do you endorse the Curfew?" mentally I reply, "How, with 'ears to hear and eyes to see,' can any one question this movement and its necessity"?

As there is no denying that prevention of crime is better than its punishment, it is certainly best to begin with care for children. Their free and untrammelled life in this country is appalling. We have a foreign population who apparently believe that unlimited license is the definition of freedom. Where there are thirty-one nationalities in one school, as in this city, and other schools where hundreds of children hear English only during their hours of attendance, where there are evening classes for men of all ages up to forty-five who have to be instructed in English in its most elementary forms, with such a large class unable to comprehend American conditions, is it wonderful that we are confronted with crime, in every form, among the youth of the country? It seems appropriate to repeat what General John C. Fremont said to me ten years since: "We should stop promiscuous immigration for thirty years, and allow for a generation of American children. Educated and intelligent immigrants, yes; but ignorant and impoverished, no!"

It is not only among the poor and uneducated that we find lack of parental responsibility. Educated people, with every advantage that money and position can give, are strangely neglectful in the home training of their children. They bring

their children up conventionally, but how many young men or young women have any idea of the responsibilities of life presented to them? Every girl should be educated in the belief that she may be a wife and mother, which, morally considered, are the most important positions in life for her; every boy should be given to understand that manhood brings with it responsibilities, and that the more elevated the position the graver the responsibility is. Home life should be made a strong point by fathers and mothers, and boys should be as carefully guarded and controlled as girls.

With these convictions in mind, a newspaper announcement in January last of "The Boys' and Girls' National Home and Employment Association" attracted my attention and induced me to consider the question of the "Curfew." The announcement was to the effect that Col. Alexander Hogeland, of Lincoln, Neb., President of the association, had sent to the Governors of thirty-one States having winter legislatures, five bills regulating crimes among youth. The bills called for no appropriations and contained the following provisions :

(1.) The restoration to their homes of all truant and tramping youths found in any of the cities, towns, or villages of each State.

(2.) The opening of free county intelligence offices in the office of the county clerk in each county.

(3.) Protection of children in the homes of dissipated and immoral parents.

(4.) Imprisoning of youth, apart from old criminals.

(5.) Providing that boys and girls and minor children in all cities, towns, and villages should be at their homes after night-fall.

I noticed that New York was not one of the thirty-one States mentioned, and I wrote to Colonel Hogeland asking why he had so discriminated as to the States. It ended by his appointing me to represent the association in this State, and he forwarded documents to aid and instruct me in the undertaking.

For months since I have watched the papers for evidence of that which I wished to ameliorate, if not cure, and have found abundant reasons for the work. In February last I sounded the first note in this State, which brought forth some hearty sympathy, some derision, and unbounded incredulity as to the possibility of accomplishing anything in this city. I have not been

discouraged, and I am daily adding to the evidence which demonstrates the necessity for decisive action. It has been a gruesome task, my search having been prolific in results. I have a collection from the daily journals of this year comprising records of "child crime" (sad juxtaposition of words) from the ages of six to twenty-one inclusive.

I am well aware that I am diverging from the exact subject of early hours for children, but no one can doubt that the crimes of older children have more or less connection with the street association of younger children in the night hours. Between six and fifteen years of age almost every known crime is committed in this city, and the period between sixteen and twenty-one seems to be the most fruitful of crime. A most potent reason for the prosecution of this work is the fact that the present youth may be the future legislators and government officials of this country.

I have been told by one of our public-school "attendance officers," whose work it is to gather in the truant school children, that the mothers of such children are largely in favor of the Curfew. One old man said: "Indeed he should be thankful for anything that would keep his children in at night." It has been suggested, through anonymous letters sent to me, that probably I have never had children of my own and consequently had no sympathy for others. Having brought up a family, my whole sympathy is for children and hence my active effort in this cause.

Whether parental neglect arises from poverty, recklessness, or natural indifference, it is unnecessary to inquire; probably each contributes. The effect upon the children, however, is to deprive them of the home influence which in early life is invaluable. The only remedy seems to be compulsory responsibility, as indicated by the Curfew Ordinance. And if it is necessary that such protection should be afforded to children in a city of one hundred and fifty thousand population, how much more is it desirable where the population is so much greater—so large a proportion of the children thereof having been surrounded by vice from birth.

Beyond the advantages to the youth and right-thinking parents, the aid thus afforded to the police in the suppression of crime must be considered, as also the additional comfort afforded

to citizens who are compelled to be abroad at night, in being freed from the shocking sights and sounds which greet the eye and ear in many portions of our city.

In the beginning of February last the Curfew Ordinance was established in Lincoln, Neb., meeting with favor from all classes. The Mayor and City Council heartily endorsed it in a set of attested resolutions, and recommended its introduction in every city in the United States.

In June, 1896, I received a statement announcing that two hundred cities had adopted the Curfew, and that city officials, parents, school teachers, employers of youthful labor, and especially chiefs of police were emphatic in their praise of its efficacy. Some of the sentiments expressed are as follows.

The Chief of Police of Omaha reports: "It is now an easy matter to enforce home rules." Chief Broder, of St. Joseph says: "The adoption of the Curfew is an act of humanity to that class of fathers and mothers with boys and girls who defy home restraint, and it will prevent crime and save taxes." Employers of labor say they get better work because better hours are kept. School teachers testify they get better work for the same reason. Chief of Police Melick, of Lincoln, Neb., says that "after the Curfew was in force a few weeks, arrests for disorderly conduct and truancy fell off fully seventy-five per cent."; and he adds: "I cannot see why any city government in the country should hesitate to enact the ordinance." The Mayor of North Platte, Neb., says: "In the two years we have had the Curfew we have sent no children to the Reform School, whereas before that we sent quite a number." Colonel Hogeland says: "The size of a city need not be any excuse for not enacting the Curfew Ordinance"; and that "it can be enforced without additional expense." In our own public schools we now employ twenty truant, or, as they are called, "attendance officers," at a cost to the city of over \$20,000, and it is hard and constant work.

New Jersey has now become interested in this work. In Melville, Cape May, Salem, Elmer, Mount Holly, and other towns the matter is being investigated. In Trenton the Rev. George C. Maddock, Secretary of the State Penal Commission and Chaplain of the New Jersey State's Prison, has inaugurated the movement. I have seen it stated that the question will be brought before the New Jersey Legislature this winter. The

State Charities Aid Association of New Jersey have taken it into serious consideration.

According to the statistics afforded by the Association in 1892, in eleven cities 13,000 policemen arrested 450,000 men, women, and children, at an expense of \$20,000,000. Among an equal number of farmers there were not 5,000 arrests.

Of the 13,000 boys and girls in reform schools in 1890, 98 per cent. went from cities, towns, and villages; that is, from one-third of the population, as two-thirds resided on farms.

Money is freely given and appropriated for the building and maintenance of States prisons, jails, poor-houses, work-houses, lunatic asylums, reformatories, truant farms, truant schools, and kindred institutions, people feeling righteous in the doing thereof. At the suggestion, however, of a measure whereby the necessity for these institutions may be lessened, we are met with apathy, or at least we have been until recently.

The Curfew Ordinance places responsibility where it belongs, on the parents.

This Association was incorporated at Washington in 1889. The members have held several conventions, and are now preparing to hold another in Cleveland next month.

Judging from the list of subjects sent to me, which are to come under discussion, it seems as if nothing connected with the welfare of children had been forgotten, yet they still ask for suggestions from others.

Much has already been accomplished by societies in New York inaugurated for the suppression of crime; and were it not for the strength which may be afforded by them, it would indeed be a hopeless task to anticipate success in this movement here. The Society for the Suppression of Obscene Literature has done great work. Its power should be extended to the prevention of the sale of that kind of literature among children which, although not absolutely obscene, is calculated to breed and foster crime among them.

As yet no definite action has been taken to bring this movement to the official notice of the authorities of this State or city. It has not been deemed wise to do so until a more thorough understanding of it has been had with the public. It is sincerely to be hoped that our newspapers will aid it, and that the societies already existing will give assistance in furtherance of the design.

The great pioneer in the United States in the labor for prevention of crime—Edward Livingston—made the following remark as long ago as 1833 :

“To arrest the vicious before the profligacy assumes the shape of crime . . . will be found more effectual in the suppression of offences, and more economical, than the best organized system of punishment.”

Charles Loring Brace, who was so well known years ago in this city as a devoted worker among the children of the poor, in the introduction to his book, *The Dangerous Classes of New York*, says : “The class of a large city most dangerous to its property, its morals, and its political life are the ignorant, destitute, untrained, and abandoned youth ; the outcast street-children grown up to be voters, to be the implements of demagogues, the ‘feeders’ of the criminals, and the sources of domestic outbreaks and violations of law.”

MRS. JOHN D. TOWNSEND.